

VZCZCXRO3725
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHRL #3490/01 3471032
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 131032Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY BERLIN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6390
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUCNFRG/FRG COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE 0179
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE 0109
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE 0163
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0425
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE 0505

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BERLIN 003490

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2021

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GM](#)

SUBJECT: (C) MERKEL AFTER ONE YEAR

REF: (A) 2005 BERLIN 3138 (B) BERLIN 3395 (C) BERLIN

2769 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Timken, Jr. Reason: 1.4(b) and (d).

Introduction and Summary

1. (C) Improving the tone of transatlantic relations has been a key goal of the first year of Angela Merkel's chancellorship, and she largely has succeeded, to the benefit of the U.S. and Germany. Merkel has not taken bold steps yet to improve the substantive content of the relationship, however. Many factors constrain German-American relations under her leadership, including the partnership with the SPD, Germany's role in the EU, public opinion, and Merkel's operational style, which in many ways is tactical rather than strategic. In engaging with Merkel and her government, there is a premium on targeting specific areas for cooperation and challenging Germany to work with us to elaborate the improved relationship her leadership has made possible. Because she is often unwilling to re-open decisions, early consultations with the Chancellor and her closest advisors will be important. End Introduction and Summary.

The Framework for Merkel's Foreign Policy

2. (C) Merkel has expressed clearly her desire to make improved transatlantic relations a hallmark of her government. As Chancellor, she has ultimate authority over foreign policy, yet she faces some fundamental constraints. Her Foreign Minister is a Social Democrat, Frank-Walter Steinmeier; Merkel cannot dismiss him without the consent of the SPD, which limits her authority over the Foreign Ministry. Steinmeier's recent visit to Syria, which he undertook despite the Chancellor's opposition, is indicative of these limitations. Only after Steinmeier came back from Damascus empty-handed did Merkel use the opportunity to articulate a policy of no high-level contacts for the time being. Other such initiatives from the Foreign Ministry are possible, where Merkel herself might not be in favor but will have to accept unless she is prepared to provoke a government crisis.

3. (C) There are further constraints on Merkel with regard to the U.S., including:

-- Germany's EU role. Berlin will have to promote consensus in its upcoming presidency capacity. This will diminish

Germany's ability and desire (limited to begin with) to impose its will upon the EU.

-- The CDU/CSU-SPD Coalition Agreement. It puts strengthened multilateral European policy and transatlantic relations on an equal footing. The European policy recommendations are much more fully developed.

-- Public opinion, including strongly held views in the Grand Coalition parties. Though Steinmeier's SPD favors eventual Turkish EU accession, its own membership supports this position only weakly. The strong opposition within the CDU/CSU and the public at large tend to confirm Merkel's tough line on Turkey.

A Search for Balance

¶4. (C) There are a few issues on which Merkel appears to be driven by principle; Turkey's relationship with the EU and her stand on the role of German troops in Afghanistan may be two examples. On the latter, she privately (and publicly) resented our efforts to move her government in the days before Riga. On most other matters pragmatism characterizes her approach. This should not be mistaken for passivity -- Merkel actively seeks viable balances, even if they anger part of her constituency. This was the case with the Coalition's health reform package, which many in the CDU opposed. The Chancellor is adept at finding allies and utilizing them to advance her preferred outcomes, such as in preparing public opinion for a German UNIFIL deployment that she favored but that was met with initial skepticism by public opinion. It is noteworthy that Merkel let SPD Chairman Kurt Beck be the first to speculate publicly about a

BERLIN 00003490 002 OF 002

German role, followed later by CDU figures. Only once the outlines of a German deployment were socialized, without public uproar, did the Chancellor articulate her vision of the mission and its connection to German interests.

¶5. (C) On transatlantic relations, Merkel is rhetorically strong, especially before transatlantic audiences. But with the general public she studiously acknowledges multiple points of view and sets up parallels that suggest a more modest role for her transatlanticism. In her speech to the CDU's national convention in November, she paired relations with the U.S. and Russia. "We need the U.S.A., just as the U.S.A. needs us," was followed by "Just as indispensable for our future is a strategic partnership with Russia." In this pervasive search for balance, the Chancellor and her government may sometimes see the achievement of agreement as more important than its content. And there is also a sense of grievance in the chancellery that, despite the notable improvement in the tone of our relations and the convergence in our strategic vision, we continue to press for more tangible changes in German policy.

Consultation and Sticking with Decisions

¶6. (C) Merkel's history indicates she has worked hard to analyze and overcome her domestic political shortcomings, such as an earlier reluctance to consult widely and trust others. She may still be engaged in a similar learning process as a foreign policy leader. Her recent proposal for a "revision clause" in Turkey's EU accession negotiations was launched, as far as we can determine, without prior consultations with key European partners or the U.S.

¶7. (C) Merkel's pragmatism should not be taken as a lack of commitment to her decisions. On the contrary, once she has made a decision, all the evidence is that she can be extremely stubborn in defense of it. Her approach to Germany's ISAF caveats in the run-up to the Riga Summit is a prime example.

Conclusion and Recommendation

18. (C) Merkel clearly likes and admires much about the U.S. -- particularly the American emphasis on freedom. She believes Germany needs, and she wants to be seen as having, good relations with the U.S. This holds true particularly for the U.S.-EU summit this spring, which German officials see as showcasing Merkel as a leader. Left to her own instincts, we believe she will tend to emphasize the positive tone of German-American relations but not put her government or its key European relationships at risk to increase cooperation with the U.S.

19. (C) We should continue to laud the improved spirit and seek to use it as a starting point for specific, targeted initiatives aimed at Merkel and her team. Civil-military engagement in Afghanistan is perhaps one area for increased cooperation. We should seek detailed discussions on Merkel's offer to train more Iraqi security forces (outside Iraq) as well. As seen in the UNIFIL deployment and the FM's Damascus visit, Merkel and Steinmeier have embarked on a more ambitious German role in the Middle East -- but have focused mainly on form rather than substance so far. Regardless of the issue, we should make use of the Chancellor's tenacity by consulting early with senior German officials. If we can win her to our side, she has the capacity to carry our common agenda over considerable obstacles.

TIMKEN JR